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DE RUEHLM #1078/01 3330949
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 280949Z NOV 08
FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8990
INFO RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 1166
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 8165
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL 1380
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 6381
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 4600
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 2433
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO 4556
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 0184
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 3662
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI 8814
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI 6199
RUEHON/AMCONSUL TORONTO 0783
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 3045
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 COLOMBO 001078

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/26/2018

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PHUM](#) [MOPS](#) [CE](#)

SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: DASD CLAD TOLD EASTERN PROBLEMS LIKELY
TO BE REPLICATED IN A "LIBERATED" NORTH

REF: COLOMBO 975

Classified By: AMBASSADOR ROBERT O. BLAKE, JR. REASONS: 1.4(b,d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: During a visit to Sri Lanka on November 22-23, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense James Clad discussed the Sri Lankan Army's military progress against the LTTE, future political arrangements in Sri Lanka's north, demobilization of the TMVP, and child soldiers with Defense Secretary Gothabaya Rajapaksa and Presidential Advisor Basil Rajapaksa. In separate meetings with the service chiefs, Clad was briefed on IDP figures, naval interdiction efforts and Air Force precautions against civilian casualties. ICRC Head Paul Castella provided the ICRC's assessment of the humanitarian situation in the north. Castella described the human rights environment in Jaffna, Vavuniya and the East, where government-aligned paramilitary groups commit abuses with impunity, as "a crisis." UNICEF Country representative Philippe Duamelle provided an update on his team's effort to end the practice of child recruitment and secure the release of the remaining 62 child soldiers documented in UNICEF files. In an impromptu meeting with President Rajapaksa, Clad conveyed the message that most U.S. security assistance and defense exports would remain on hold pending significant progress on our human rights concerns. He noted that forward movement on the release of child soldiers would permit resumption of U.S. programs to help with maritime and aerial surveillance and communications. End Summary.

Basil and Gothabaya Confident of Victory

12. (C) In a meeting with both Gothabaya and Basil Rajapaksa, Basil declared that the government faced no economic pressure to halt military operations. He argued that reduced oil prices, as well as increased remittances and agricultural output, were allowing the military advance to continue unhindered. The Defense Secretary reported that he was confident the offensive would be complete before the end of the year. Gothabaya went on to outline a strategy of stabilization in the north after the government regained full

control of that province, analogous to the moves the government has made in the east. The Defense Secretary stated that the central government will play a key role during the coming transition in the north because the likely political leadership there will lack experience. Former fighters would not accept more experienced outsiders as their leaders; therefore, the current problems in the east will likely be replicated in the north, he said. Both Basil and Gothabaya expressed confidence that the issue of child soldiers would be resolved shortly, with Gothabaya saying he would take more direct charge of GSL's efforts on both child soldiers as well as disarming the TMVP as a whole.

Service Chiefs Stress Efforts
to Limit Civilian Casualties

13. (C) Army Commander Fonseka pegged the IDP population in the eastern Vanni at 150,000, far less than the 209,000 to 230,000 that UNHCR and other organizations have estimated. Fonseka said that the main concentration of IDPs is in a 40 square kilometer area between Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu. He recounted cases of drivers for both Government Agents and the UN trying to smuggle explosives into the Vanni. During a meeting at Navy headquarters, Navy Commander Karannagoda described his force's interdiction efforts in the Palk Strait. He claimed that ownership of fishing boats by Indian politicians complicated efforts to prevent LTTE smuggling of fuel, medicine and explosives through the waterway. Both Fonseka and Air Force Chief Goonetilleke (in a separate

COLOMBO 00001078 002 OF 003

meetings) stressed that the military was very careful to avoid civilian casualties.

ICRC Chief Compliments Military Forces on Conduct;
Calls East, Vavuniya and Jaffna a "Crisis"

14. (C) Country representative of the ICRC Paul Castella commended the Sri Lankan forces for the manner in which they were conducting operations in the north. He stated that while the humanitarian situation in the Vanni was not at a critical level, there was an ongoing human security crisis in the east, Vavuniya and Jaffna as government-aligned paramilitaries conducted killings, abductions and arrests on a significant scale. He reported that ICRC had access to declared LTTE and GSL detention centers but suspected there were detention facilities that remained undeclared. Castella informed DASD Clad that ICRC had already begun planning for the next phase of the war. Like the Defense Secretary, Castella expected a "liberated" north to have many of the same problems currently afflicting Vavuniya and the east. He expressed concern that after securing control over the Vanni, the GSL would ask ICRC to leave.

UNICEF: Internal TMVP Tension and Security Force
Passivity Stall Efforts on Child Soldiers

15. (C) UNICEF Chief Philippe Duamelle briefed DASD Clad on GSL-UNICEF efforts on child soldiers (ref A) and asserted that internal TMVP tension and the security forces' passivity were stalling efforts to release the remaining 62 children on UNICEF's rolls. Duamelle stated that UNICEF had recorded 6000 cases of child recruitment during the entire conflict by the LTTE, but guessed that was a fraction of the overall number. He stressed that the TMVP continues to recruit. While 70 TMVP child soldiers have been released since January 2008, 50 new child soldiers have been recruited in the same period.

16. (C) In a separate, hastily-called meeting with DASD Clad, President Mahinda Rajapaksa raised the issue of spare parts for aircraft, radars, and Bushmaster guns. DASD Clad explained that absent significant progress on human rights

issues, the U.S. will remain unable to support transfers or acquisitions of most defense articles. However, he noted that forward movement on release of child soldiers serving with paramilitaries could enable the U.S. to resume assistance for maritime and aerial reconnaissance and surveillance, as well as communications. President Rajapaksa commented that he would give the Justice Ministry until December 15 to generate momentum on child soldiers. After that, the President said he would personally get involved. The President also stated that after the Sri Lankan conflict is resolved, the Sri Lankan military may be in a position to provide some forces for Afghanistan.

¶7. (C) COMMENT: As the military closes in on Kilinochchi, both the Defense Secretary and the ICRC Chief previewed a future scenario where many of the problems in the east -- violent factional infighting, high levels of disappearances, small-scale LTTE raids, significant levels of abductions and extra-judicial killings -- would be replicated in the north as the government worked to bring stability to an area held by the LTTE for years. Post will continue to urge the government in private and in public to pursue a political solution in tandem with its current military focus. This will be essential in order to build legitimacy for new governance structures and ameliorate the serious human rights abuses that most observers expect will mark a Vanni controlled by government forces.

COLOMBO 00001078 003 OF 003

¶8. (U) DASD Clad cleared this message.
Blake